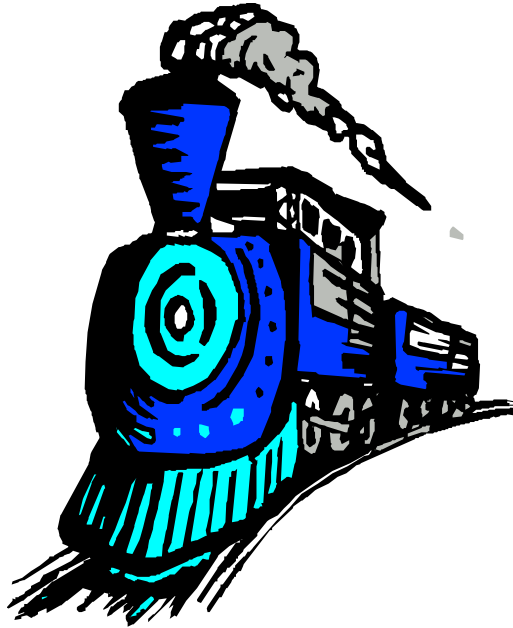


Helping Them to Be All That They Can Be!



Understanding, Responding & Communicating  
With Challenging Youth Using Positive,  
Strength-Based Theories & Techniques

Charlie Appelstein, MSW

[charlieap@comcast.net](mailto:charlieap@comcast.net)

[www.charliea.com](http://www.charliea.com)

[facebook.com/charlietraining](https://facebook.com/charlietraining)



Twitter: @charlieap

## The Power of a Positive, Strength-Based Approach

**What is it?:** An emerging approach to guiding children and youth that is exceptionally positive and inspiring. It begins with belief that all young people have or can develop strengths and utilize past successes to mitigate problem behavior and enhance functioning. It continues with practice methods that identify and marshal these strengths for necessary behavior change.

Strength-based practice is essentially about two words: Attitude & Actions

Professionals maximize the potential of the children and youth they serve when they convey and attitude to each and every one that says: *I believe in all of you. I know you will succeed this year and beyond and I am absolutely thrilled to be part of your life.*

And then, through their daily actions - show that they mean it.

Genuine believing helps kids to feel better about themselves, attacks self-doubt (self-doubt kills ability – Degas), and, most importantly, provides hope – which is humanity’s fuel.

Research has shown that a student entering high school with a history of committing aggressive acts is not likely to commit further acts of aggression (at his/her school) if the student believes there is at least one educator at the school that thinks “I’m terrific!”

- James Garbarino, Ph.D.

“I was successful because you believed in me.”

- Ulysses S. Grant in a letter to Abraham Lincoln

Strength-based practice is, to a great extent, about the power of positive relationships and cultures.

Three Universal Truths from Kids at Hope (KidsatHope.com), an evidence based, strategic-cultural model which reverses the youth at risk” paradigm by establishing a holistic methodology that engages an entire school, youth organization and/or community:

1. Children succeed when they are surrounded by adults who believe they can succeed no exceptions.
2. Children succeed when they have meaningful and sustainable relationships with caring adults.
3. Children succeed when they can articulate their future in four domains rather than one, which is generally Education and Career; Community and Service; Hobbies and Recreation.

“Countless studies have found that social relationships are the best guarantee of heightened well-being and lowered stress, both an antidote for depression and a prescription for high performance.”

- Shawn Achor, The Happiness Advantage, p.14

New research in psychology and neuroscience finds: “We become more successful *when* we are happier and more positive. Students primed to feel happy before taking math achievement tests far outperform their neutral peers. *It turns out our brains are literally hardwired to perform at their best not when they are negative or even neutral, but when they are positive.*”

- Shawn Achor, *The Happiness Advantage*, p. 15

According to Achor, what do all happy people have in common?

Meaningful Social Connections

Strong Social Support Networks

Excerpts from David Shenks’ *The Genius in All of Us*:

But the new science suggests that few of us know our true limits, that the vast majority of us have not even come close to tapping what scientists call our ‘unactualized potential.’

With humility, with hope, and with extreme determination, greatness is something to which any kid-of any age-can aspire.

Most underachievers are very likely not prisoners of their own DNA, but rather have been unable to tap into their true potential.

*Happiness is not the belief that we don’t need to change; it is the realization that we can.*

Achor, *The Happiness Advantage*, p.24

*Twenty years from now, the youth you currently guide won’t remember much of what you said to them, but they’ll all recall how you made them feel.*

A smile is the face’s way of giving an emotional hug.

Adolescents with post traumatic stress disorder – traumatized youth – have been neurologically rewired to shut down (i.e. become protective) when confronted by an adult who approaches too fast, too high, and/or with a stern or angry expression. Such approaches will prompt fear, flight, or fight reactions. Such youth are 24/7 hyper-vigilant to environmental cues.

Have you ever watched an actor in a bad mood? If you’re in a bad mood, it might be prudent to fake that you’re not. Actors entertain for a few hours; youth care professionals save lives.

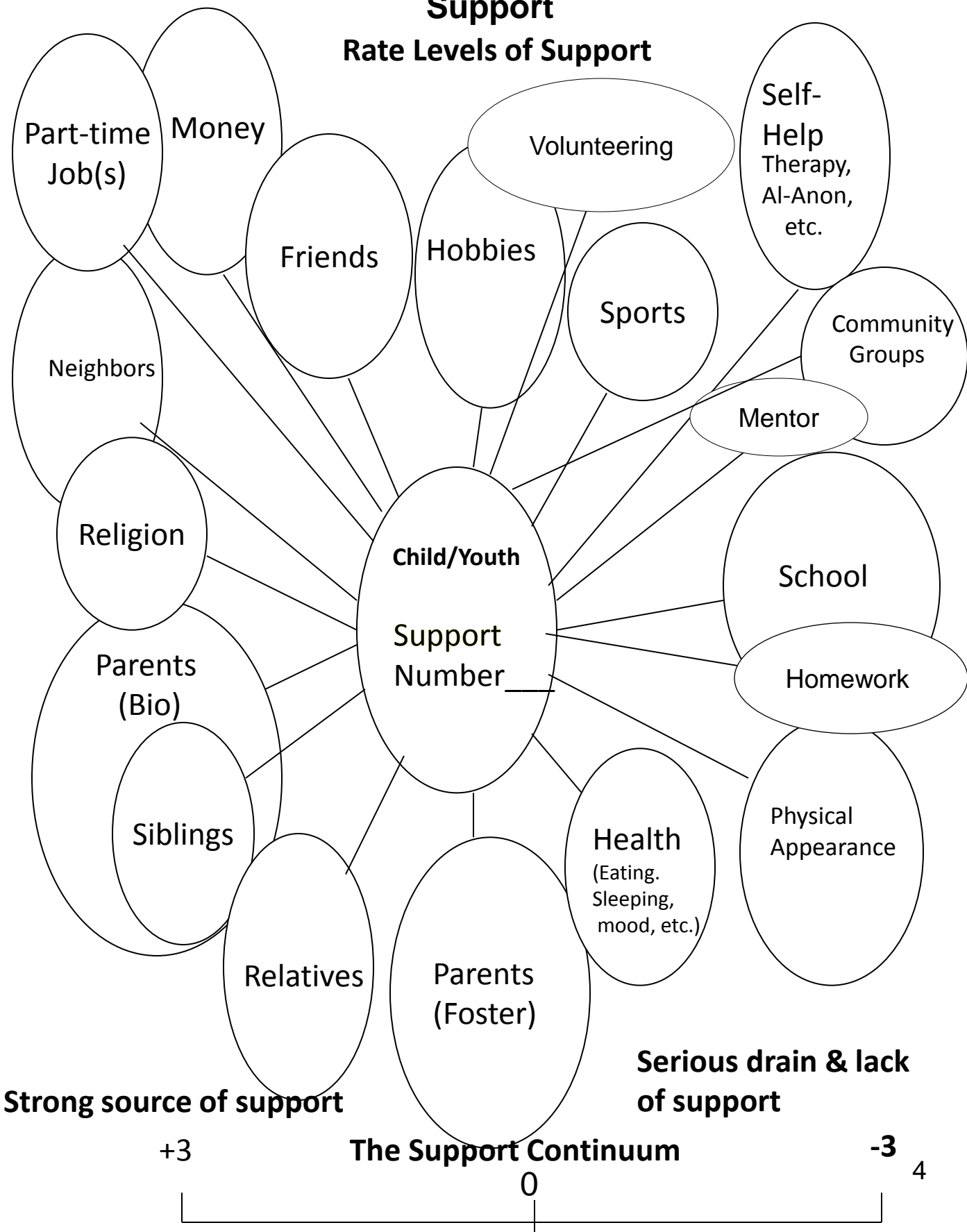
Attitude is a choice.

A positive attitude sends the message: I want to be here. I care about you. I believe in you. And I know you will succeed. Which all leads to hope, happiness and success!

*Hope is Humanity’s Fuel*

# The Connections Map - Building & Maintaining Support

Rate Levels of Support



## The Brain & Resilience

All young persons have strengths and with positive support can change the course of their lives. They have resilient brains that can be “rewired” by positive learning experiences.

Resilience is the ability to thrive in spite of risk or adversity. The term comes from physics: a resilient object bends under stress but then springs back rather than breaks. A resilient child not only springs back from adversity but can become stronger in the process. The feeling of accomplishment that comes from solving life problems is the core of resilience.

Resilience is a natural trait in all humans. Human brains are specifically wired to cope with problems. However, humans cannot survive and thrive alone – they require support and encouragement from others.

Resilience is a combination of inner strengths and external supports. All youngsters need supportive families, peers, schools, and mentors to optimally sustain and develop their potential strengths.

Recent advances in resilience science find that the human brain is designed to be resilient. The brain is structured to overcome risk.

The brain is not like a computer, but more like a resilience library. It stores information bearing on survival and well-being and discards most other data. Problems can either be treated as occasions for punishment or opportunities for learning and growth.

Neuroplasticity refers to the reality that the brain is malleable and can therefore change throughout its existence. Positive, and frequently occurring experiences, can create new neural pathways that enhance functioning and produce growth.

Recent research shows that the *broadening effect* (how positive emotions broaden the amount of possibilities we process, making us more thoughtful, creative, and open to new ideas), is actually biological. Positive emotions flood our brains with dopamine and serotonin, chemicals that not only make us feel good, but dial up the learning centers of our brains to higher levels. Positive emotions help humans to organize new information, keep that information in the brain longer, and retrieve it faster later on. And they enable us to make and sustain more neural connections, which allows us to think more quickly and creatively, become more skilled at complex analysis and problem solving, and see and invent new ways of doing things.

“Brain change, once thought impossible, is now a well-known fact, one that is supported by some of the most rigorous and cutting-edge research in neuroscience.” (Achor, P. 29)

Conversely, negative emotional experiences like rejection activate pain centers in the brain just as physical stress does. Brain scans indicate that being excluded or rejected triggers feelings of distress and a burst of activity in the area of the brain that also reacts to physical pain. Destructive or defensive reactions (fight, flight, fright) can be triggered by such negative emotional states. Thus, being able to think about problems, talk them over with others, or even write about feelings or express them creatively can be helpful.

The brain has three major parts with different functions:

- **The Logical Brain** (prefrontal cortex) handles language, reasoning, and emotional control so Humans can intelligently solve problems and make meaning of life events. This area of the brain does not fully develop until adulthood.
- **The Emotional Brain** (limbic brain) triggers emotions that motivate behavior. The *amygdala* scans for stimuli for cues of danger or interest, triggers emotions, and stores important events in long term memory.
- **The Survival Brain** (brain stem) reacts to danger by triggering fight or flight mechanisms. These reflexive behaviors insured survival in the wild but are not geared to the threats faced by humans in modern life.

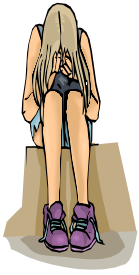
Psychiatrist Bruce Perry (2004) has found that children traumatized by neglect and abuse overuse more primitive brain systems. Their survival brains are chronically stimulated, and they are at high risk of engaging in behaviors which hurt themselves or others.

These destructive emotional impulses can only be regulated by mature capacity in the higher brain centers. But many of these youngsters have not had the nurturance and learning experiences to fully develop brain pathways for self –control. Thus their heightened impulsivity, frustration, and motor hyperactivity combine with an underdeveloped capacity to accurately perceive situations and problem solve. This unfortunate combination severely limits the child’s ability to maximize his or her potential.

As mentioned, Brendtro writes that human brain is like a library. Individuals who have suffered trauma remember everything. It’s as if they have wings of pain, wings of shame, wings of humiliation in the lower regions of their brains. And they can’t afford to include any new books! A positive, safe, strength-based culture diminishes the fear that many traumatized kids live with. It replaces the wings of pain and shame with wings of accomplishment and pride. Positive, safe environments allow these individuals to venture outside their circles of protection (survival brain) and venture into (utilize) the higher regions of their brains – enhancing decision making, success and happiness.



The (survival) brain of a traumatized individual



## Gus on Pejorative Labeling



Look, I know some of us can be quite difficult. I was a hellion my first six months, considered quite obnoxious. But it was simply defensive posturing. (Can you say defense mechanism?) Kids aren't bad. They're just screwed up. The kid who's pushing you away the most is probably the one who needs you the most.

I think every residential center would be better off if they never used words as manipulative, lazy, un-invested, controlling, and obnoxious. They're pejorative adjectives. When you label one of us in such a way, you contaminate the waters and no one wants to swim with us any more.

*"Manipulative kids aren't fun to work with."*

*"They're a pain in the ass."*

*"Boy, is that kid manipulative!"*

Every time we get blasted for being "manipulative" (or any other such term), our self-concept suffers. We take on that word – we internalize a sense of badness. Yet the kid you call "manipulative" might have come to your facility with a history of manipulating his way out of getting beaten. So, maybe manipulating ain't so bad. Maybe it simply needs to be understood in the context of a child's situation. Maybe people don't need to use these words anymore.

P. 24 "I had been an excellent math student, but the day she told me I was "spacey" and unfocused was the day I stopped connecting to math."

Note: Throughout this handout will be references to the manuscript:  
*Helping Traumatized Children Learn produced by Massachusetts Advocates  
For Children* [www.massadvocates.org](http://www.massadvocates.org).

## Decoding Problem Behavior

Response to problem behavior: Understand > Reframe > Squeeze

*Behavior is always a message*

Pejorative Label	Positive, Hope-Based Reframe
Obnoxious	Good at pushing people away
Rude, arrogant	Good at affecting people
Resistant	Cautious
Lazy, un-invested	Good at preventing further hurts, failures
Manipulative	Good at getting needs met
Just looking for attention	Good at caring about and loving yourself
Close-mouthed	Loyal to family or friends
Different, odd	Under-appreciated
Stubborn & defiant	Good at standing up for yourself
Tantrum, fit, outburst	Big message
Learning disability	Roadblocks

*Life isn't what you see, it's what you perceive!*

When you change the way you look at a challenging youth ...the youth changes.

Pejorative labels lead to the creation of *stereotype myths* (entrenched , negative self-perceptions) – Gladwell, *Outliers*



## Reframing

Seeing and praising the positive, self-protective value in “negative” behaviors

1. A youth who is always looking for attention:

**R:** I apologize to you for anyone who has ever put you down for looking for attention. I think it's great you look for attention – good or bad. It means you haven't quit on yourself. You probably haven't received enough attention in your life and you're looking for it now. Are there better ways to seek it? Sure, and we can talk about them. But I don't want you to spend another minute of your life thinking that there's something wrong with looking for attention!”

2. A youth who won't talk about his/her feelings:

**R:** You're a real loyal daughter. I think you hold everything in to protect your family and I think that's quite admirable. Your mom is very lucky to have a kid like you. But this isn't us against your family, we're on the same side (connecting statement –see page ).

3. A youth who acts rudely:

**R:** You have an amazing ability to affect people! Or, “I think you're pretty good at giving to others what you've received.”

4. A student who makes funny noises at the wrong time:

**R:** You're a very creative kid. What range, pitch, resonance! These are great noises. How about saving them for the end of the day. You can put on a show for five minutes.

5. A youth who acts in a stubborn manner:

**R:** You're good at standing up for yourself and what you believe. Some of the greatest people in the world were quite stubborn about their causes: Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa. But the great ones all new when to give in a little.

6. A youth who seems unmotivated:

**R:** You're pretty good at protecting yourself. If you don't try you can't be embarrassed. But you're a bright kid and if you just take it step by step you'll probably have success.

7. A youth who frequently swears:

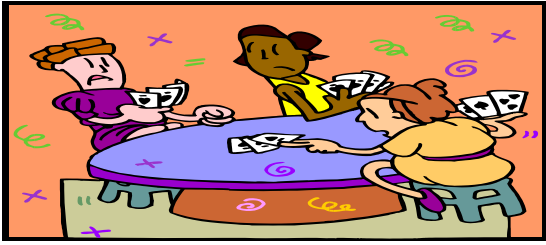
**R:** You're very expressive! You've got words I never heard before. Might use a few at the Cowboy's game. How about saving the expressive language for times your alone with one of us, not in front of the other students. Thanks.

8. A youth who's bossy with peers:

**R:** You've got great leadership skills. You're a natural.

# Providing Hope & Possibility Through Metaphors & Positive Predicting

## Poker



“Life is like a poker game. Even if you’re dealt a bad hand, you can still win the game. Prison is full of people who blame their upbringing for why they broke the law. But for every one person in prison who blames his/her family, there are 100 folks on the outside who were raised in similar circumstances but *chose* to be good citizens.

## The Melting Snowball



“See your fears and worries about (pending issue/loss/transition) as a big snowball in the middle of your chest, and understand that as each day goes by, it’s going to melt a little. It may stay forever...but it will become so small that you can build a great life around it.”

## The Roadblock



“It’s not a learning disability, bi-polar, Asperger’s; it’s a roadblock. All big cities have them, but people get to work on time every day. Why? They find away around it. You can to. Many successful people have roadblocks similar to your.”

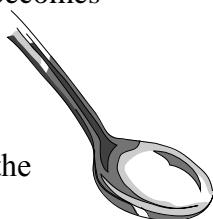


“Learning is my ticket to a great Life!”

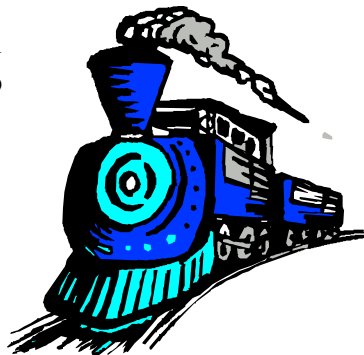
## Positive Predicting

When you talk about the future in positive terms, you make any desired outcome more possible. And when it’s more possible, it becomes more probable!

“How should we celebrate when...”  
“When we recover the onside kick...”

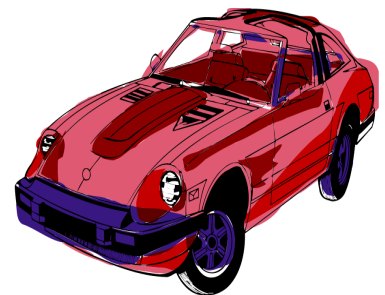


## The Train



“You’re big and powerful...but you’ve gotten off track. All great trains get off track. What can we do to get to get you back on the rails? You will get to a good place.”

## The 2013 Edition



“Cars improve every year. People get better every day. You’re the 2013 Steven. You don’t over-heat as much as the 2012 Steven...have a sleeker design, follow the road signs better. Don’t give me this bull: ‘Same old me.’ You get better every day...wiser, more experienced, more mature.. 10

## Visualizing the Future

James Garbarino postulates that terminal thinking – the inability to articulate one’s future – may be the clue to why some children succeed while other’s fail.

## Positive Predicting

When you talk about the future in positive terms, you make any desired outcome more possible. And when it's more possible, it becomes more probable!

“How should we celebrate when you...”

“When we recover the onside kick....”



“One, two, three...ICE CREAM!!!!”

“Twenty years from now when you’re a very successful businessman and family guy, which staff member from this program - who always believed in you and helped you turn the corner – do you need to find and pay back?”

**Kids at Hope.com**  
**Third Universal Truth**

3. Children succeed when they can articulate their future in four domains rather than one, which is generally Education and Career; Community and Service; Hobbies and Recreation.

Create questions that you can ask the kids you work with:

[illegible]

## Strength-Based Practice

SB practice is powerful combination of the strength-building model and solution-focused therapy

Emphasis is on:

*Strength-building* rather than flaw-fixing

*Doing* rather than understanding

*Believing* in every youth unconditionally - See and believe!– Not “Believing is seeing” (positive responses are earned)

..which produces **Optimism** – which feeds possibility, and motivates coping and adaptive behavior, even in the face of difficult odds: *Hope is Humanity's Fuel*

P. 57 “Lacking the words to communicate their pain, they may express feelings of vulnerability by becoming aggressive or feigning disinterest in academic success *because they believe they cannot succeed.*”

**Continues** with practice methods that identify and marshal these strengths for necessary behavior change.

### The Goal:

*Change* rather than *insight* and *awareness*

### The Work:

*Problem-driven* not problem-focused (solution-focused):

Devoted to helping kids *initiate actions* to dispense presenting problems

Primarily *short term*

*Goal-oriented* and focused on *resolving the identifying problem*

### Assumptions (or lack thereof)....

Strength-based practice does not assume that ownership of guilt is somehow automatically curative....Does assume that change is inevitable, not uncertain

Strength-based practice does not assume **LARGE** problems require **LARGE** efforts for solutions....Does assume that **SMALL** changes can ripple out to bring resolution.

## Solution-Focused Questions

A model of questions that help kids recognize and build upon inherent strengths.

The language of Hope and Possibility

### **Explorative Historical:**

How many kids have been, or are, in similar situations? How many succeeded? So why can't you? What steps did they take to succeed? How will we celebrate when you get there? Have you ever been in this position before and handled it okay? How did you manage? What skills did you use? So maybe you can use them now?

### **Qualifiers:**

"I hate this place!" > "So you're saying you're really upset about being here *right now*."

### **Past Tense:**

"I'm stupid!" > "So you haven't been feeling real smart lately."

### **When & Will:**

"I'll never make a friend!" > "When you do, what will it be like?"

### **Scaling Questions:**

"On a scale of one-to-ten, ten being that you'll make lots of friends at the new school – zero, you won't make any....what number are you at now. When it's higher in a month, how will you feel?"

### **Identifying In-Between Change:**

"What will be the first sign that you've turned the corner."

### **Amplifying Change Using Speculation:**

"You've had some great weeks. Do you think the reason you're doing so well has something to do with getting older and more mature? Have you also figured out that doing better truly gets you more of what you want?"

### **Exception questions:**

"Have there been times recently when the problem did not occur?"

### **Changing Perspective Question:**

"Given all that you've been through. And I maybe know one-tenth of what's gone on...how come you're not doing worse? You're my hero. Dude, I think you make the mistake of comparing yourself to the other kids here. That's wrong. There's only one person you can compare yourself to. That's someone who has been through exactly what you have. If I could find 10 other kids with your exact history - you'd be up here and they'd be down there. Man, you've got more courage in your pinky than I have in my entire body. You are my hero. And the thing that freaks me out is that I think you're going to do even better!"

## Activities & Self Esteem Building

To help youth enhance self esteem, provide tasks and activities that offer a:

### Universal Opportunity for Individual Success

Create and/or modify tasks and activities to maximize success opportunities

**Example:** A basketball game where the ball must be passed 3 times before it can be shot.

#### Self-Esteem Building Options:

- Professional & amateur sports
- Games: Board, video, bingo
- Special events (food drives, car washes, bottle-collecting, walk-a-thons)
- Karaoke & music (concerts, kazoo bands, shows, music videos, lip-syncing, etc.)
- Employment opportunities (Key: cultivate relationships with local employers)
- Volunteering (w/handicapped, elderly, younger kids, animals, etc.)
- Sports (bowling, karate, roller-skating, soccer, etc.)
- Fitness (create fitness charts, aerobics, jogging/walking, meditation, rope and obstacle courses, etc.)
- Hobbies (art, theater, music, crafts, pottery, card and/or coin collecting, carpentry, photography, magic, etc.)
- Animals (pets, therapeutic horse-back riding, fish, etc.)
- Home repair jobs (painting, landscaping, repairing, etc.)
- Religious endeavors



P.57 "Every child has an area of strength in which he or she excels, Whether it is in academics, art, music, or sports. When educators can identify and focus on a child's strength, they afford the child the opportunity to experience success, with all the emotional implications of doing something well. This is an important starting point in mastering academic content and social relations, which in turn serve as a basis for success at school."



*Trumpet Success*

*Every kid needs his/her own special niche!*

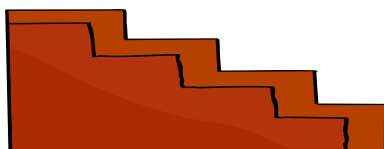
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Call parents with good news....keep a scrapbook....hang pictures, etc.

# Helping Inflexible/Explosive Children & Youth

## Characteristics of Such Kids:

- Display deficits in frustration tolerance
- Generally do not respond well to consequences and rewards (i.e. traditional motivational approaches)
- Symptoms are thought to emanate more from neurological as opposed to psychological factors
- Prone to stubborn, inflexible, explosive outbursts
- Often display genuine remorse after an episode



## How to Help:

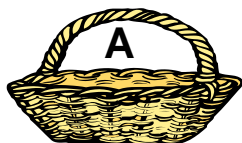
- Create *user-friendly* environments to *clear the smoke* (take the air out of the balloon)
- Determine which behaviors need to be addressed and how best to respond. Categorize behaviors and responses into one of three baskets:

A = Non-negotiable

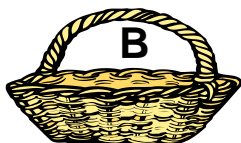
B = Compromise & Negotiation

C = Ignore

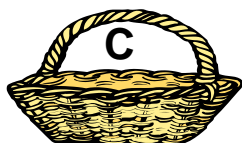
- As kids *meltdown* and approach *vapor lock*, immediately *distract*, *empathize*, and offer aid. Help them to downshift into a calmer state (i.e. make the *cognitive shift*).



*A = Non-negotiable, often a safety concern. Consequences could be issued.*



*B = Room for compromise & negotiation*

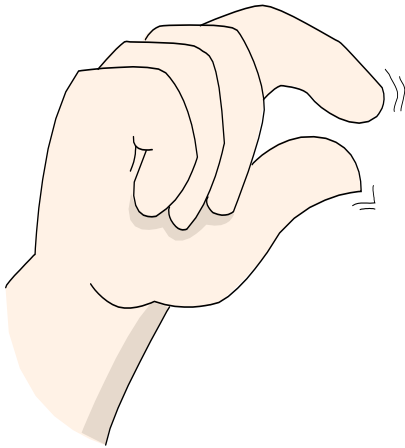


*C = Ignore*

# Strategic Verbal Interventions

## The Millimeter Acknowledgement

Strength-based practice does not assume that ownership of guilt is somehow automatically curative



“Do you think it’s slightly possible that perhaps, maybe....”

“Could, maybe, 1% of this have something do with...”

## Honoring Hellos and Goodbyes

“You can’t say hello until you have first said goodbye!”

Stages of grief: Shock & Denial, Anger, Sadness, Acceptance

### Examples:

Goodbye to: Living w/family of origin

Hello to: Foster or adoptive care

Goodbye to: Loss of idealized childhood

Hello to: What was real, the good that can be remembered, and life ahead.

Tip: Replace cognitive distortion (stinkin’ thinkin’)

Example: Angry that staff member is leaving, but feeling lucky that we got to work together for so long.





## Strength-Based Practice: Principles

### Seeing is Believing

= Unconditional support

If you visit the home of family that has a toddler or two what do you see everywhere? Toys. Did the children need to earn them? No. They were offered unconditionally. This act of unconditional love and kindness strengthens bonds, facilitates object constancy (my parents are always there for me), and enhances self-image (“I’m someone of value!”)

vs.

### Believing is Seeing

= Standard behavior management

(If I do well, I am rewarded. If I don’t, I am not)

*Seeing is believing* produces **Optimism** – which feeds possibility, and motivates coping and adaptive behavior, even in the face of difficult odds

### *Seeing is Believing*

“Butch, you D’a man! We’re excited that you’re here!”



**NOT:** *Believing is Seeing!*

“We’ll treat you nicely once you put that slingshot down, lose some weight, and get rid of that ridiculous hat!”

### Seeing is believing examples:

Have lunch with a struggling youth; Do something fun with a group that is struggling; bring in a special snack; give the group extra recreation time even if they haven’t earned it. “You don’t always have to behave great for me to treat you great. I love working with you guys and I care about you –regardless of your behavior. Of course, I like good choices and fine acting – but I’m behind you either way.”

Tip: Perform deliberate acts of kindness

## **Cues to Use (Coping Thoughts/One-Line Raps)**

Encourage kids to create and practice coping thoughts - in the form of cues or one-line raps – to diminish or eradicate problem behaviors (i.e. bad habits). Cues are more successful when they rhyme, are rhythmic, humorous and repeated often. Practice makes perfect!

*The brain is designed to change in response to patterned, repetitive stimulation.*

### **Anger Control**

NBD...easier than 1-2-3! NO BIG DEAL!

Stop and think, don't be a dink!

Let it go, Joe (Just stay cool no need to blow)

Let it go...So (So I can be happy or earn things, etc.)

When you're mad...don't do bad (or don't get sad)...just talk or walk.

Talk, walk, or squawk! Stay in control, that's the goal. I can, I will, I gotta chill.

### **Social**

Take turns when you talk, if you don't the kids will walk.

Give kids their space, it's their place. Stay arms lengths away...today.

Think about them thinking about me, it's as easy as 1,2,3.

### **Self-Harm**

If you hurt number one, it's never better when you're done.

### **Following Through/ Being Independent/Organization**

Don't quit, take it bit by bit

Inch by inch, life's a cinch. Yard by yard, life is hard.

Take it little by little and play da fiddle!

Organize and be wise. Prepare for tomorrow and avoid the sorrow!

Like a king on a throne, I can do it on my own.

Step after step, that's the prep. Take it inch by inch...it's a cinch!

Sit and relax, learn to the max! Make a list, it will assist.

### **Drugs and Alcohol**

I can make it if I choose, time to quit the drugs and booze.

If you lose hope, don't do dope.

### **Anxiety**

Don't be in a hurry to worry. Breathe in, breathe out...eases doubt.

Stop and listen, cause you don't know what you're missing.

Count to ten and then do it again. Take a break for goodness sake.

### **Encouragement/Affirmations**

I'm smart. It's in my heart. Learning is your (my) ticket to a good life.

I can make it if I choose...Only I can make me lose. If it is to be, it's up to me!



**Use Bongos!**

View more cues  
at [www.charliea.com](http://www.charliea.com)

## Externalizing & Naming Negative Behaviors

Giving life and a name to a problematic issue or “bad habit” (i.e. externalizing it) can help kids rid themselves of problematic tendencies/habits/compulsions.

Examples:

A student who needs to do things perfectly:

*“Get lost Mrs. Perfecto! Get out of here. Get off my back, you loser!”*

A youth who is prone to behavior outbursts:

*“Get out of here Mr. Fitz!”*

A youth who talks rudely:

*“Get lost Rudy! You’re nothing!”*

A youth who argues incessantly:

*“Go far Mr. R!” “You’re through Mr. R. Gue!”*

A student who is reluctant to write:

*“Get out of town, Mr. No Write!”*

A student who skips school or is frequently tardy:

*“Are you going to let I.B. Truant/Tardy get you into trouble next week?”*

A youth who is often provocative:

*“Why are you letting I.B. Provokin get you in trouble?”*

A youth who often evidences a negative and “me against the world” attitude”

*“Hey, tell Chip not to come in tomorrow.”*

Create your own: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Humor in the Lifespace

### Role of Humor

- Forms a bridge between adult/child world (i.e. counters resistance)
- De-mystifies individual persona/reduces power messages
- Enhances relationship building
- Tension reducer
- Provides effective modeling
- Improves self-esteem
- Enhances identity formation (e.g. niche theory)
- It's FUN!!!
- It's reflective of the environment
- Demonstrates caring

### Rules:

- Try! But give up quick
- Do not view the use of humor as an *extra*; it should be an integral communication technique.
- Make no assumptions about who can or can't be humorous - for everyone is capable!
- Avoid sarcasm

### Forms:

- Self-Deprecating
- Slapstick
- Joke Telling
- Grandiose Praise
- Humorous Games
- Musical Expression
- Poetry



## Transitional Objects & Humor

Sustain "humorous" moments via:

The written word    Photos    Recordings    Videos

## **Behavior Modification: Strategically Using Incentive Plans**

- Reward Improvement.
- Create an incentive system that's easy to administer, and follow through!
- Make incentive systems time-limited unless they are part of an ongoing plan.
- If used for one or two kids, keep charts in a private place. Be discreet!
- Award incentives in a private manner.
- If other kids complain. "Why don't I get checks and rewards?" be honest with them, explain that every kid is unique and that some have special needs. Ask for *their* help in getting the child back on track.
- Slowly raise expectations for incentives – but don't act too fast.
- In general, the more troubled a kid appears, the greater the frequency he/she should be rated and rewarded. As kids improve, frequencies should decrease.
- Be flexible. Incentive systems frequently need to be changed and modified.
- Kids often tire of the same rewards. A great deal of creativity and effort often needs to be put forth to successfully maintain systems.
- Make incentive charts and/or document forms colorful (but age-appropriate) and easy to read.

## Suggested Rewards

Adults must provide rewards based on available resources (i.e. "best possible"). Ideally, the best pay-off for a kid is *individual time with an adult*. This reward has obvious ancillary benefits that material items do not. For instance, a kid who earns 30 checks during a week might be able to trade them in for 30 minutes of one-to-one time with an adult. The kid could choose to do sports and/or games with the adult. Based on circumstances, it's often advantageous to allow a kid who has earned individual time to invite a friend to join him/her.

If circumstances and/or resources do not allow for kids to earn one-to-one time, than earning computer time or time doing something else that's enjoyable is preferred to paying-off with material items.

Other non-material rewards include:

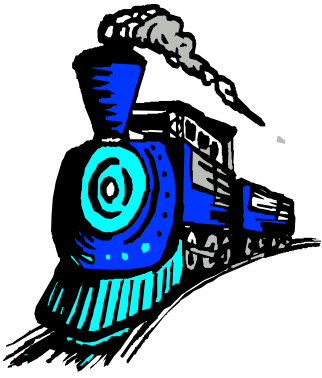
- Special activity trips
- Later bedtime
- Additional free or recreational time
- Additional time at a favored activity
- Earning a special chore or privilege
- Watching a video, or having preferred music played

If material items need to be used as incentives, here are some options:

- Art supplies
- School supplies
- Candy (generally for short, time-limited programs)
- Gift certificates, itunes card, bus passes
- Food (e.g. snacks, pizza, McDonalds, etc.)

### Other Considerations:

Using points or checks is a popular method for administering incentive systems. Most behavior charts are created on 8 x 11 paper and consist of various grids which denote the time periods in which the youth will be observed/rated, criteria for earning points or checks, and available incentive rewards.



## Staying on Track, Jack!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Dates \_\_\_\_\_

Goal(s) for the week:

	M	T	W	Th	F	Total
Be cool... Get a good report from school						
Be more respectful to the adults in my life (Here's some advice, talk real nice!)						

Total \_\_\_\_\_

2 points = Excellent effort in this area

1 point = Okay effort in this area

-- = Train off track

## Pre-Talk Considerations

### Number One Goal: Engage!

Listen, empathize, paraphrase, offer help, apologize, repeat, offer hope...HOOK 'EM in!

- Don't be defensive. Anticipate negative comments – don't take them personally...

*"It's an injury and it will heal."*

- Expect *displacement* (i.e. anger directed at you that is meant for someone else.)
- Assess your relationship and feelings toward the youth. Think PIE (i.e. everyone deserves an equal slice)

*"The kid who is pushing you away the most, is probably the one who needs you the most"* (*The Gus Chronicles I*, Appelstein)

- Practice the talk in your head. Longer discussions generally have a beginning, middle, and end phase.

Other considerations: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Core Verbal Interventions

## Supportive Interventions

"You seem really upset!" "This stinks!" "How can I help?"

## Repeating or Paraphrasing w/qualifiers

Youth: "I hate this place."

Worker: "So you're saying you're pretty upset with this place *right now*." (Use qualifiers: yet, at the moment, right now, etc.)

## Feelings Update

"How do you feel about that?"

## Sandwich Approach

"You made a bad decision to knock over the plant, but I'm *really pleased* about how you walked away from the area."

## Praise and Encouragement

"Way to go!" "That was fantastic!" "I like the steps you took to get this done" (praising the action versus the child). "Hey, you've done this before and you can do it now. Be the man!"

## Humor

To a fifteen-year-old: "You're acting just like a teenager!"

## Apologizing

"I'm sorry for raising my voice to you."

## Reasoning Responses

"What if we let every kid...."

## Connecting Statements

"It's not me against you. I'm on your side. I don't like having to keep you back."

## Empowering Interventions

"What could you have done differently?" "What do you think we should do?"

## Surface Clarifications

"Let me make sure I know why you're upset."

## Explorative Responses (psychological)

"You don't usually get this upset. Could something else be bothering you?"

## Explorative Responses (historical)

"Have you ever completed such a difficult assignment?"

"Have you ever got this angry and not hit someone?" "How have other kids got through this?"

## Explorative (reflective)

"Is that behavior working for you?"

## Plan Making

"Can we make a plan to handle this situation better next time?"

## Proactive Considerations Assessment

The following assessment identifies some of the key elements/components of a strong, strength-based setting. Rate your program on a 1 to 5 basis.

5 = We are very strong in this area      3 = We're okay      1 = An area of considerable weakness

1. The youth are properly supervised. There is a system in place (e.g. a person who is accountable for making sure the adults are properly situated) to insure that adults maintain good sight lines to all of the youth\_\_\_\_.
2. There are established "routines" on weekdays and weekends concerning: meals, homework, chores, showers, bedtimes, etc\_\_\_\_.
3. The environment is neat, clean and orderly (common areas and bedrooms)\_\_\_\_.
4. Information about the day is presented to the youth as early as possible. ("This is the plan for the day.") *Key:* Avoid surprises. At times, it's helpful to post a calendar of events or a daily "What's Happening" sheet. Of course, there are certain events, such as visits or evocative appointments that we only tell kids about a day or so in advance\_\_\_\_.
5. There are ample recreational supplies and activities offered\_\_\_\_.
6. House rules and those regarding discipline are clearly outlined, and are *fair, logical, and consistently* applied. It is often helpful to post or write down key rules. Establishing rules around food intake, phone usage, autonomy, dress, etc. often reduce problematic acting out\_\_\_\_.
7. Considerable effort is devoted to *teaching* and *practicing* "good" behavior (i.e. following the rules). Use role-plays, modeling, games, quizzes, self-talk and direct communication to repetitively teach expected behavior (i.e. making good choices) \_\_\_\_.
8. Power is not misused. Kids with trauma histories are hypersensitive to misuses of power. For instance, yelling at - or asking - at-risk youth to do things without saying "*please*" and "*thank you*" will increase the probability for inappropriate behavior\_\_\_\_.
9. Kids are warned before upcoming transitions: "*Lucy, in five minutes we'll be eating dinner.*" "*Hey guys, in ten minutes we'll be leaving for school.*" \_\_\_\_
10. Transitions to and from activities are conducted appropriately. *Key:* The more troubled and/or unsafe a youth or group appear, the greater the need for an orderly and well-managed transition\_\_\_\_.
11. The resident's personal hygiene and self-grooming are strongly supervised and encouraged\_\_\_\_.
12. The lighting is adjusted as the day winds down\_\_\_\_.
13. Break areas are in less stimulating locations and are properly supervised\_\_\_\_.
14. The phones are located in places that are conducive to supervision\_\_\_\_.

15. Communication systems are clear and flowing between the youth and his/her entire team of caretakers:\_\_\_\_

School (i.e. teachers, guidance, etc) , therapists, social workers, case workers, parent(s), other key individuals in the kid's life, the child or youth (e.g. Create a daily "What's Happening" sheet. Meet daily to preview the day ahead)

**Key:** Create *interlocking partnerships* between all of the above. Try and establish consistent meeting times, and/or devise communication procedures that will enhance collaboration efforts, such as a homework log that gets passed between school and home. **DO NOT ALLOW** "splitting" to occur. All professionals working with a kid and/or group must stay "on the same page."

16. Staff members actively use and promote humor. (But avoid sarcasm!)\_\_\_\_

17. Kids' personal issues are explored and anticipated\_\_\_\_.

18. Staff members resist using negative adjectives when addressing kids, such as using terms like: obnoxious, lazy, rude provocative, etc. Instead, professionals should describe the behavior and how it makes them feel. Adults should look for the underlying reasons *why* kids act inappropriately\_\_\_\_.

19. Staff members receive strong support from their superiors (e.g. weekly supervision, regular training opportunities, as needed support and reinforcement, praise, accessibility, etc.) \_\_\_\_.

20. Requests to the youth are often delivered in a sequential manner\_\_\_\_.

Good:                *"John, please pick up the clothes under your bed and put them in the hamper. Afterwards, I'd like you to vacuum the floor. Thanks."*

Less

Effective:        *"John, go in and clean your room."*

21. At-risk kids feel like losers. Activities are created and modified so that every youth has the opportunity to enjoy multiple successes. \_\_\_\_

22. Positive accomplishments are displayed and memorialized (e.g . Pictures and school papers are hung on walls, each kid has a success scrapbook (transitional object), etc.)\_\_\_\_

23. Staff members consistently maintain personal boundaries. Be clear as professionals what *is* and what *isn't* appropriate to relate to troubled youth\_\_\_\_.

24. Staff members are sensitive to and actively support cultural differences\_\_\_\_.

25. Staff members commence every shift with positive attitudes, warmly greeting the kids\_\_\_\_.

26. Inflexible and/or explosive kids with possible neuro-developmental disorders have environmental demands/expectations modified to be in sync with their unique wiring (Use the A,B,C, baskets)\_\_\_\_

27. Staff members frequently use positive strength-based communication techniques (e.g. reframing, solution-focused questions, inspirational metaphors, etc.)\_\_\_\_

28. Staff members use inspiring language to motivate the residents (e.g. Positive predicting and inspiring metaphors such as the train – “Let’s get back on track, man.”)\_\_\_\_\_.
29. The daily activity schedule is plentiful and full of options that provide multiple success opportunities to all of the residents\_\_\_\_\_.
30. Treatment and behavioral expectations are modified/individualized for each resident based on their neurological and psychological make-up\_\_\_\_\_.
31. The residents feel empowered with respect to the functioning of their setting\_\_\_\_\_.
32. Motivational systems (e.g. level and point systems) are conducive to the nature of the residents (i.e. Each resident is quite capable of earning the highest level and residents do not become “stuck” on lower levels for appreciable amounts of time)\_\_\_\_\_.
- 34.. The setting is family-friendly (e.g. Staff members enthusiastically reach out, engage, and work with family members)\_\_\_\_\_.
35. The staff members eat with the residents during meals and the food is plentiful, tasty, and varied. And the residents have input regarding the menu\_\_\_\_\_.

## Behavior Management: Understanding, Prevention, and Principles

View misbehavior as a message: “*Something is wrong. I need help.*” Try to *respond* instead of *react* to difficult behaviors. In other words, don’t say or do anything to a child or youth that you wouldn’t want said or done to yourself. Practice the *Golden Rule*

Use your observing ego (e.g. “It’s an injury and it will heal. Respond instead of React”)

Practice *pattern identification*. Note if a youth or group act out in a predictable manner (i.e. at the same time each day, over the same issues, etc.). Once a pattern is identified, investigate your (or the setting’s) role in contributing to the problem(s). What can you change, modify or practice? How can you make the environment more *user-friendly*? Next, seek out the youth’s input and develop a plan.

Constantly *practice* and *reinforce* the desired behaviors.

Behavior experts suggest individuals should hear four positive comments for every one negative.

Use *consequences* instead of punishment. A consequence is *related* to an inappropriate behavior, a punishment is not. Consequences reinforce the values of your setting/society.

In general, the sooner a consequence follows a misbehavior the more effective it will be. Try and avoid delayed consequences except for serious behaviors.

Practice progressive discipline

Issue consequences that have a *high probability* of being accepted. Be careful about using traditional motivational approaches with non-motivational youth (A,B,C Baskets)

Establish a limit setting progression. In other words, everyone should know exactly what happens if a youth refuses to accept a limit.

Use *best possible* interventions but advocate for resources to enhance the treatment climate.

Whenever possible, and for more serious behaviors, try and let the youth or group decide the appropriate consequence(s) based on two key factors: severity and frequency

## Limit Setting

Limit setting progresses in five clearly defined stages:

First:	Supportive
Second:	Logical Consequences
Third:	Physical Intervention
Fourth:	Processing
Five:	Reintegration

First Stage: Supportive Interventions include but are not limited to:

Verbal prompts, reminders, warnings

Redirection, distraction, divide & conquering

Appropriate verbal dialogue (e.g. Compromise, negotiate, reframe, support and help, explore, explore historically, ask youth to state the rule, etc.)

Hydraulically squeeze (i.e. Find a benign place for the youth (or group) to do the same behavior. Example: A youth who swears is allowed to swear one-on-one with an adult in a private location).

Humor

Non-verbal interventions (e.g. Hand signals, lights out, circulating around the room, etc.)

Use the power of a group

Channel (e.g. Have an energetic kid do something physical)

Hold an impromptu meeting

Vicarious reinforcement (Praise another youth for the behavior you want the youth in question to display.)

Selective ignoring

In general, if two or three supportive interventions don't work in a relatively short time period, a logical consequence should follow.

# Logical Consequences

## Proximity Manipulation

Levels of supervision can be intensified when children and youth behave inappropriately:

“John, would you please sit up front for the remainder of the activity?”

“Carla, we're going to walk side-by-side to the gym.”

“Billy, you will need to stay in sight of a counselor until dinner, and then we'll talk.”

Other option: Move the higher functioning kids away from where a challenging kids is having difficulties

When a youth begins to improve his behavior, he can earn the incentive of gaining more freedom, with respect to his proximity to adults.

Supervision levels can be created to address unsafe, problematic acting out, such as: *In-sight, one-to-one, and close supervision*. These levels – which represent proximity manipulation – can be adjusted as a kid or group regain (earn) their trust.

## Re-Doing

Youth who have trouble meeting expectations, such as walking quietly to lunch, not running in the hallways, talking inappropriately, etc., can be asked to **re-do** the specific task.

“Okay John, I'd like you to go back to the living room and try walking here again...s-l-o-w-l-y.”

“Could you please try and redo this chore? I don't think it's your best effort.”

“Could you please try and say that to me again? Thanks.”

**Option:** “I think you said I'm a wonderful dude and a sharp dresser, but I'm not sure.”

## The Directed Chat

When a youth is not responding to supportive interventions, an adult – if conditions permit – can request a private chat, preferably in a different location. By changing location, it is often easier to approach the issue at hand with more calmness and emotional distance. Going to a neutral location often facilitates conflict resolution.

An adult, for instance, could ask a disruptive youth to join her outside the kitchen for a minute. Oftentimes, by giving a kid such one-to-one attention, problematic behavior is ameliorated.

## **Removal of Attention**

At times, the best way to deal with negative behavior is to walk away from it and/or switch-off.

Staff member: “You’re choosing to make me upset. I think I’m going to take a break from being with you now. I’m hoping that later we can work this out.”

If a staff member is becoming angry with a youth or group, a fellow staff member should be empowered to step in and take over for the person. Some programs employ a “tag-off” like in professional wrestling.

## **Natural Consequences**

Natural consequences involve discipline that it is a *natural* byproduct of one’s actions.

Examples:

“I think I am going to stop working with you now. I’m uncomfortable with your language. You could make better choices. I’ll check back with you in a little while to see if you can talk with me in a more civil manner.”

If a group is too loud and unruly an adult could just sit quietly and wait for them to calm down. Other consequences could be applied if this intervention isn’t successful.

A youth refuses to do his homework. The natural consequence: He fails the test.

A youth refuses to wear gloves. The natural consequence: Frozen fingers



## **Loss of Privileges**

Restricting a privilege, such as using a computer, going off-grounds, or missing an activity, is generally a *delayed consequence* and should only be used for more serious behaviors or when minor behaviors become problematically repetitive.

Bettelheim: Taking activities away from a troubled child is like taking cough syrup from a person with a sore throat

## **Reparation (Restitution, Community Service, etc.)**

If a child or youth acts out towards a human being or physical object, it invariably causes psychological and physical damage, respectively. It is, at times, helpful to have the youth (or group) that has offended *repair* the damage (within herself, as well). Examples:

A youth is caught bullying others:

**Reparation:** Have the youth apologize to the kids he/she has tormented and require her to help others for a certain duration of time.

A youth throws food in the cafeteria:

**Reparation:** Require the youth to help out in the dining area.

Another way to frame this consequence is to view the act of repentance as “giving back.”

Staff member: “Bill, you took away some of the respect and harmony we feel here by making the bad decision to damage the property. I’d like for you to give something back by coming up with a project that will contribute to the well-being of this place.

You took something away...now give something back

Whenever possible let the youth or group decide the consequence

## **Breaks (Time-Out)**

Children and youth often react negatively to the term *time-out*. As a result, it is best to use alternative terminology:

“Could you please step outside the room and *chill out*, thanks?”

“Jim, I'd like you to sit on the bench, calm down, and think about making some better choices, thanks.”

“Sara, would you please take *break*, thanks. You can choose where to do it.”

There are two forms of Breaks: **Set Amounts** and **Open Ended**

**Set Amounts** = Established time-out lengths and progressions

*Example:* 2 minutes > refusal > loss of points > refusal > contextual decision > completion of original 5 minutes > processing.

**Open Ended** = No set amounts of time for breaks

*Examples:* “Could you please go sit on the couch for a while and chill out.” > refusal  
> “The longer it takes you to move, the less likely it becomes for you to get involved with the activities coming up.”

2 warnings (i.e. supportive interventions) > “Could you please take a break. Please return when you think you are ready to calmly join the group.”

2 warnings (i.e. supportive interventions) > “Could you please take some space? I'll come and talk to you when you are sitting quietly.”

### **Where are Breaks Conducted?**

Best place: A non-stimulating area; a natural part of the room. You don't necessarily have to have specific time out areas. Give kids a choice about where to take their break.

### **How are Breaks Conducted?**

Youth should always be allowed to sit comfortably to complete breaks. A break should be conducted in a quiet and respectful manner. The youth does not have to be facing the corner or wall

## **Extended Separation (i.e. a Breaks longer than one hour)**

For violent and ultra-serious behavior it is often helpful to have the youth who has offended to be away from the group for an extended period of time to regroup and work through the issue. During extended separations youth should not be bored and uncomfortable. It is not a punishment.

## **Grounding, Restricting, & Taking Things Away**

*Key tips:*

Don't take things away from a child unless what you are taking away is the *source* of the problem.

For example:

You take a radio away because you have repeatedly warned the child about it being played too loud.

When grounding a youth over a specific behavior - remember - the child will most likely repeat the behavior (soon). If you make the original grounding for too long a time (such as a week), what will you do if the child exhibits the same behavior tomorrow?

Groundings, restrictions, etc. should follow a *progression* (i.e., the first time the child does X, he is grounded to the house for X amount of time. The next time he does X, he is grounded for XX amount of time, etc.

**Practice:** Progressive Discipline and empower the youth to help make these decisions

**Processing:** Upon completion of a consequence, kids and staff members should generally process what occurred. They should be asked to:

- Give their view of what happened.
- Come up with better choices that could have been made.
- Recollect if they have been in similar situations and acted more appropriately?  
If yes, what skills did they use?

Adults should be open to admitting mistakes and taking some ownership for what transpired. Apologizing is a powerful tool.

**Reintegration:** Review steps for integrating back into the milieu (i.e. review expectations, logistics, etc.

## Strength-Based Tools Checklist

Unflinching Positive Attitude																
Reframing Understand>Reframe>Squeeze																
Inspirational Metaphors: Poker, Melting Snowball, Roadblock, Train, Car (“We get better every Day.”)																
Solution-Focused Questions: Explorative Historical, Repeating w/Qualifiers, When & Will, Scaling Questions, Identifying In-Between Change, Amplifying Change Using Speculation, Exception Questions, Changing Perspective Questions																
Provide Multiple Opportunities for Individual & Group Success & Trumpet Successes																
Create a “User-Friendly” Environment for Cognitively Inflexible Young People. Use the A,B,C, baskets																
Respect & Explore Cultural Diversity																
The Millimeter Acknowledgement																
Honoring Hellos & Goodbyes																
Being Family Friendly																
Using Seeing is Believing vs. Believing is Seeing (Standard Behavior Man.)																

Using Seeing is Believing vs. Believing is Seeing (Standard Behavior Man.)																
One-Line Raps																
Repetitive Quizzing (The Stretch)																
Externalizing & Naming Positive and Negative Behaviors																
Humor (But Not Sarcasm)																
Incentive Plans that Reward/Celebrate Improvement. Creative Use of the Medium of Exchange (e.g. Billy Dollar)																
The Observing Ego (Respond instead of React): "It's an injury and it will heal." Lack of Support Leads to Punitive Actions																
Affect Scale																
Content/Message ("Please & Thank you. I, We vs. "You".																
Non-Threatening Non-Verbal Interventions																
Core Verbal Techniques: Support & Help, Repeating and/or Paraphrasing, Feelings Explor., Sandwich Approach, Praise & Encouragement, Humor, Apologizing, Reasoning, Explorative (Psychological, Historical, Reflective, Plan Mak.																